

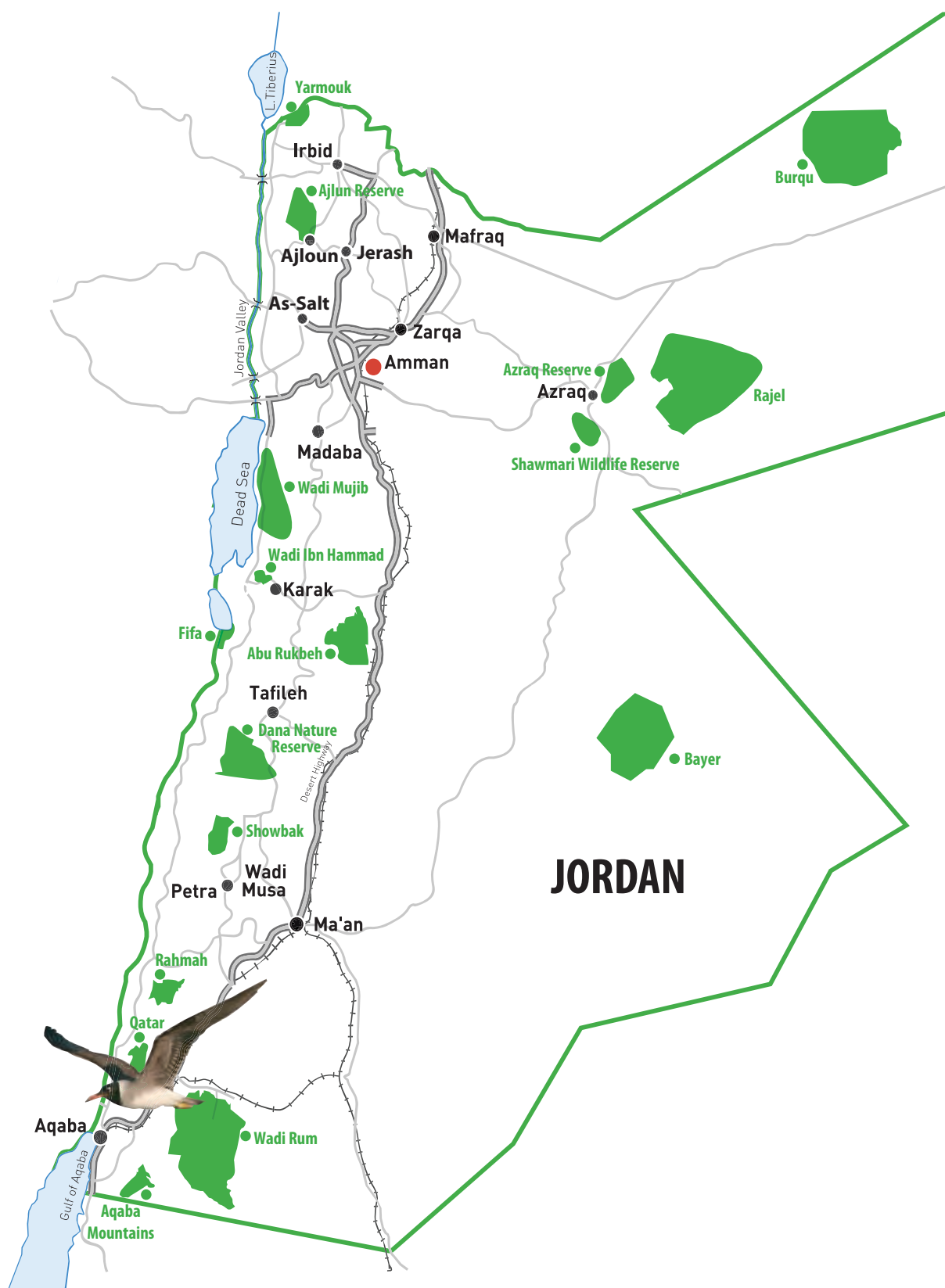


# **BIRDWATCHING IN JORDAN**

Where Birds From Three Continents Converge

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# BIRDING IN JORDAN

Jordan has a unique location, nestled at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula where the edges of three continents overlap: Asia, Africa and Europe. This small country lies at the heart of major bird migratory routes and has a diverse geology and natural landscape as well, which hosts a large variety of flora and fauna including numerous bird species. Remnants of the rich history of the area are scattered throughout the entire country, and thus most of the main birding sites in Jordan are within or near major tourism attractions.

The people of Jordan are warm and hospitable, and they are keenly aware of their rich natural heritage and go to great lengths to protect it and ensure its continued well-being. For this reason, several large nature reserves have been set up and are professionally managed, in order to minimize negative impacts on the natural habitats and rare species of Jordan's flora and fauna.

In Jordan, 27 Important Bird Areas (as per the Birdlife International programme) have been identified by the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSCN), which is the BirdLife Partner in Jordan. These IBAs cover an area of 7,600 km<sup>2</sup> or %8.5 of Jordan's surface area. The country's IBAs include a variety of natural habitats that should or are being conserved to sustain significant bird populations in the country.



*SYRIAN SERIN*



*PALESTINE SUNBIRD*



*SINAI ROSEFINCH*



*BLUE ROCK THRUSH*



*TEMMINCK'S LARK*



*WHITE EYED GULL*



*CREAM-COLORED COURSER*



*GRIFFON VULTURE*



PHARAOH EAGLE OWL



THICK BILLED LARK



LEVANT SPARROWHAWK



PIED KINGFISHER

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Jordan is a great destination for bird-lovers and dedicated birdwatchers. Its remarkable variety of habitats, from rugged mountains and evergreen woodlands to scrubby steppe, hot dry deserts and the subtropical Jordan valley, provide the perfect environments for many species of indigenous birds.

Located at the crossroad of Europe, Asia and Africa means that migrating birds funnel through the rift valley from these three continents and can sometimes be seen together in the same general area.

More than 435 species of birds have been recorded in Jordan, of which around 70 are resident, 21 are migrant and present during the non-breeding season, and almost 350 are migratory, passing through between their breeding and non-breeding grounds. Some of these migrant birds end their migration journey in Jordan to breed. Migration is not limited to large birds; migratory species passing over Jordan range from Imperial Eagles and White Pelicans to Garden Warblers, White Wagtails and everything in between.

Two different migration periods can be distinguished. During the spring migration, huge flocks of raptors can be observed, such as the Steppe Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Steppe Eagle and Levant Sparrowhawk. In the Autumn, migration flocks of Steppe Eagle use the Jordan Valley to continue their journey from Europe to Africa, in addition to hundreds of Montagu's Harrier and Pallid Harrier, which cross the eastern desert plateau.

## THE MAIN BIRDING SITES

Most places in Jordan offer opportunities for bird watching and with major shifts in landscape and nature within short distances, there is much diversity as you move around the country. However, there are a number of key sites for bird watching that together host a wide cross-section of the country's breeding and migrant birds.

The birdwatching sites presented here are easily accessible and represent the main habitat types found in Jordan. Birds highlighted to look out for are specialties within the sites they are listed under and are relatively easily seen. Those listed under "Be one of the few to record" offer a challenge to the avid birdwatcher to spot, as they are rarer and have been reported by bird observers and anthropologists.

# AZRAQ WETLAND RESERVE



**Look out for:**

**Be one of few to record:**

**Seasons:**

**Recommended time in the field:**

**Accommodation:**

**Other attractions:**

**Tips:**

Passage migration and desert species including Honey Buzzard, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin Marsh Harrier, Crane and the introduced White-cheeked Bulbul.

Menetries' Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler and Moustached Warbler.

All year round; Autumn, Winter and Spring for migration, including water birds, and Summer for breeders.

2 Days.

Azraq Lodge, a converted 1940s British military field hospital. It has an authentic atmosphere, combined with a modern twist, and provides comfortable accommodation from which to explore the Eastern Desert.

Azraq Castle, Desert Castles.

Try local dishes prepared by local communities.

# SHAWMARI WILDLIFE RESERVE



**Look out for:**

Eastern Imperial Eagle, Cream-coloured Courser, Temminck's Horned Lark and Eagle owl

**Be one of few to record:**

Turkestan Shrike and Yellow-throated Sparrow.

**Seasons:**

Throughout the year.

**Recommended time in the field:**

1/2 Day(s).

**Accommodation:**

Azraq Lodge, a converted 1940s British military field hospital. It has an authentic atmosphere, combined with a modern twist, and provides comfortable accommodation from which to explore the Eastern Desert.

**Other attractions:**

Azraq Castle, safari trip in the Shawmari Wildlife Reserve.

**Tips:**

As well as birds, you can observe the Arabian Oryx in its natural habitat.



# BURQU

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**Look out for:**

**Be one of few to record:**

**Seasons:**

**Recommended time in the field:**

**Tips:**

Basalt Wheatear, Desert Lark (dark morph), Thick-billed Lark, Temminck's Horned Lark.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and Cinereous Vulture.

Best in the Spring and Autumn, and in the Winter for raptors.

1 Day.

This can be done as a trip from Azraq. A 4x4 vehicle is required to reach Burqu, which lies 20 kilometers off the road to Ruweished inside the desert. In autumn, look for migratory raptors soaring along the highway on your way to Ruweished .

Other areas of this desert can also be explored for bird watching, including Safawi on the way.

# AJLOUN FOREST RESERVE

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**Look out for:**

Sardinian Warbler, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Wren

**Be one of few to record:**

Brambling and Hawfinch at Ajloun

**Seasons:**

Best in the Spring and Summer.

**Recommended time in the field:**

2 Days.

**Accommodation:**

Ajloun Lodge, Rasoun campsite and a number of small hotels in the city.

**Other attractions:**

Tall Mar Elias, Ajloun Castle, Jerash, hiking trails.

**Tips:**

You can base yourself in Ajloun and spend more time there enjoying several nearby birding sites including Arayes pond, Dibeen and Yarmouk Forest Reserve. Try local dishes prepared by local communities.

# DIBEEN FOREST RESERVE

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<b>Look out for:</b>	Syrian Woodpecker, Blue Tit.
<b>Be one of few to record:</b>	Brambling, Siskin and Hawfinch.
<b>Seasons:</b>	Spring, Summer and Autumn.
<b>Recommended time in the field:</b>	1/2 Day(s).
<b>Accommodation:</b>	Ajloun hotels, camps, lodge.
<b>Other attractions:</b>	Roman city of Jerash.
<b>Tips:</b>	Combine this trip with a few days based in Ajloun.

## YARMOUK FOREST RESERVE



**Look out for:**

Syrian Woodpecker, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Goldfinch and Great Spotted Cuckoo.

**Be one of few to record:**

Black-headed Bunting

**Seasons:**

Spring, Summer and Autumn.

**Recommended time in the field:**

1 Day.

**Accommodation:**

Ajloun hotels, camps, lodge.

**Other attractions:**

Ajloun Castle, hiking trails, Um Qais, Pella.

**Tips:**

Stop at the Bridal Lake at Yarmouk Forest Reserve to watch migratory waders.

# MUJIB BIOSPHERE RESERVE



**Look out for:** Black Storks, Bonelli's Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, Striolated Bunting, Fan-tailed Raven, Tristram's Starling.  
**Be one of few to record:** Barbary Falcon.  
**Seasons:** Autumn is the primary season, with good sightings in the Winter and Spring.  
**Recommended time in the field:** 1 Day.  
**Accommodation:** Mujib Chalets, Dead Sea hotels and Madaba hotels.  
**Other attractions:** Nature reserve, wadi hike, Dead Sea  
**Tips:** Several hotel resorts are about an hour's drive away from Mujib Reserve Biosphere and are worth stopping at.

## FIFA NATURE RESERVE

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<b>Look out for</b>	Dead Sea Sparrow, Sand Partridge, Little Green Bee-eater.
<b>Be one of few to record:</b>	Nubian Nightjar.
<b>Seasons:</b>	Spring and Autumn.
<b>Recommended time in the field:</b>	1/2 Day(s).
<b>Accommodation:</b>	Mujib Chalets and Dead Sea hotels
<b>Other attractions:</b>	Dead Sea.
<b>Tips:</b>	Base yourself by the Dead Sea to visit Fifa and nearby sites including Mujib.

# DANA BIOSPHERE RESERVE



**Look out for:**

Syrian Serin, Griffon Vulture, Hume's Owl, Palestine Sunbird, Black-eared Wheater and Woodlark.

**Be one of few to record:**

Macqueen's Bustard. The name of the species has been changed and is now known as either Macqueen's Bustard or Asian Houbara.

**Seasons:**

Spring, Summer and Autumn.

**Recommended time in the field:**

2 Days.

**Nearby birding sites:**

Sad Al Tannur, Feynan, Petra, Shobak Castle.

**Accommodation:**

Lodges, small hotels.

**Other attractions:**

Nature reserve, hiking trails and Shobak Castle.

**Tips:**

Enjoy the area's beautiful hiking trails and look for Nubian Ibex in its natural habitat.

# QATAR NATURE RESERVE

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**Look out for:** Sand Partridge, Arabian Warbler, Arabian Babbler, Cream-coloured Courser.  
**Be one of few to record:** Dunn's Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Nubian Nightjar.  
**Seasons:** Spring and Summer.  
**Recommended time in the field:** 1 Day.  
**Accommodation:** Hotels in Petra, Feynan Eco Lodge.  
**Other attractions:** The Nabataean city of Petra.  
**Tips:** Combine a trip here with a stopover at Petra.



# WADI RUM PROTECTED AREA



**Look out for:**

**Be one of few to record:**

**Seasons:**

**Recommended time in the field:**

**Accommodation:**

**Other attractions:**

**Tips:**

Sinai Rosefinch, Sooty Falcon, Hooded Wheatear, Long-legged Buzzard, Scrub Warbler, Trumpeter Finch.

Red-rumped Wheatear.

Spring and Autumn.

1 Day.

Campsites.

Desert tours, sand dunes, hikes, camel treks, Bedouin culture

Spend the night at a Bedouin camp for a unique desert experience.

# AQABA BIRD OBSERVATORY



**Look out for:**

Little Green Bee-eater, passage migration of soaring birds, Arabian Babbler, White-eyed Gull.

**Be one of few to record:**

Black Bush Robin, Caspian Tern, Arminian Gull, Lesser Black back Gull, Crested honey Buzzard, Spotted eagle, Olive-backed Pipit.

**Seasons:**

Spring and Autumn.

**Recommended time in the field:**

2 Days.

**Nearby birding sites:**

Wadi Rum, Rahmeh, Qatar.

**Accommodation:**

Aqaba hotels.

**Other attractions:**

Water sports, souk.

## **JORDAN'S BIRDS SPECIALTIES**

Jordan is a special place for bird watching as a result of its position along the Great Rift Valley on one side and at the edge of the Mediterranean and Arabia on the other. Its unique landscapes also play a role, with the Sharah and Rum mountains in the south, the Dead Sea in the west and the Basalt Desert in the East. Thus several species are specialties to Jordan and were selected as such based on a combination of factors. All species on the list are special to the country, the Levant or West Asia and/or can be relatively easily seen in certain parts of the country. The order of the list follows the order in Collins Bird Guide Second Edition (Svensson, 1999), one of the most widespread field bird guide books used in Jordan, if not the region.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*

*Migratory, mainly a wintering species in Jordan*



This near-threatened duck species has been recorded regularly in Aqaba over the past two decades, but the largest numbers are found at the Tannour Dam, between Karak and Tafleh, during winter.

**Sand Partridge** *Ammoperdix heyi*

*Seen all year round*

Look out for it along the southern rift margins from Mujib all the way to Aqaba Mountains, including Dana and Rum.



**Chukar** *Alectoris chukar*

*Seen all year round*



Dana is the best place to look for it where you may get the impression that it is a widely common species. However it is difficult to spot outside the reserve due to hunting. Its call is probably one of the sounds you will hear most frequently in Dana.

**Levant Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter brevipes*

*Seen from late April to early May*

It can be seen across the country during this limited period of the migration season.

Good locations to look for it are along the rift valley and in Azraq.



**Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*

*Seen during migration and in winter*

While it can be seen anywhere throughout migration seasons, the best locations are in the eastern desert in areas like Burqu and Safawi.



**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni*

*Seen in spring and summer*

It breeds along the rift margins, mostly in the southern ones around Dana, Shobak and Petra. It can also be seen near agricultural fields in the plains east of the highlands while foraging.



**Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor*

*Seen in late spring and summer*

It arrives later than other migrants and breeds in the southern highlands and margins including Petra, Rum, Rahmah and Dana.



**Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*

*Seen all year round*

It can be seen all across the rift margins and highlands. Dana remains the only confirmed breeding location in the country.



**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*

*Seen in spring and summer, and in less numbers in autumn and winter*

This can be seen in all arid habitats in the country in the eastern desert and Wadi Araba. Shaumari, Ber Madhkur and Aqaba are also good locations to look for it.



**White-eyed Gull** *Larus leucophthalmus*

*Seen all year round*

It can be spotted in Aqaba only. Look for it along the south of Aqaba.



**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis*

*All year around, better in spring and winter*

A nomadic species that can be seen more during good wet seasons in any flooded area of the eastern desert. The best time to look for it is in the early hours of the day when it comes to drink.



**Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis*

*Seen all year round*

It is believed that this species is expanding its distribution. Aqaba and Azraq are probably the best locations to look for it.



### Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*

Seen in spring and summer

It is probably more widespread than initially thought. The best spots to look for it are in dense arboreal habitats in the northern highlands including Dibeen, King Talal Dam and Yarmouk.



subspecies. Breeding of this other subspecies *ascalaphus* has been confirmed around Tel El-Rumman in the northern part of the country. Other northern records from Irbid and Amman most probably belong to the latter subspecies



**Note:** The species has been divided into two: Eurasian and Pharaoh. The Eurasian Eagle Owl, referred to as the Eagle Owl (scientific name *Bubo bubo*) is no longer considered to be in Jordan. It is the Pharaoh Eagle Owl (scientific name *Bubo ascalaphus*) that is currently present in various parts of the country, and this is divided into two subspecies, both of which are believed to be present in Jordan.

### Hume's Tawny Owl *Strix butleri*

Seen all year round



Around the southern sandstone highlands. It is regularly heard along the upper part of Wadi Dana, which is probably where you will have the best chance of seeing it in Jordan. Other locations include Little Petra and Wadi Rum.

### Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*

All year round

It has long been believed that this species should be more common than already documented. Fifa has recently become the best location to look for it, most preferably at dusk.



### Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*

Seen all year round, but more noticeable in breeding season in February and March and in the eastern desert in winter.

Jordan is likely located on the junction between both subspecies of the species. Southern and eastern records from Rajil, Azraq and Rum most probably belong to the subspecies *desertorum*, which looks smaller and paler than the other



### Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Seen all year round

It is widespread along the rift margins and highlands and becomes easy to spot when it is most active during the breeding season in the spring.

### White-Throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

All year round

A resident along the Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea, more easily seen in water reservoirs, like Karameh Dam but it can even be seen along the main roads.



### Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

All year round



Less common than the White-throated Kingfisher but they share almost the same distribution in the country along the Jordan Rift Valley, north of the Dead Sea (Al-Ghor). More restricted to water bodies, such as Kafrein and Ziglab Dams.

### Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

Seen all year round

It is found in the southern rift valley from the shoreline of the Dead Sea all the way to the Red Sea, around acacia trees. Mujib and Aqaba are probably the best locations to look for it but it can still be seen anywhere with acacia trees along the Wadi Araba road.



### Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

Seen all year round

In the northern highlands restricted to arboreal habitats. The best locations to look for it would be Yarmouk and Dibeen.



### Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunnii*

Seen all year round but most notably in spring



Not the easiest lark species to be spotted in the country as Jordan represents its northernmost global distribution. Most of the few recent records were from the southern part of the country around Aqaba.

### Temminck's Horned Lark *Eremophila bilopha*

Seen all year round

This is probably the most common lark species in the eastern desert. The easiest place to look for it is Shaumari, but it can be seen in various other locations including the plains to the east of the southern highlands.



**Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey*

*Seen all year long, but more in spring and winter*

Another nomadic species that follows water. It is more widespread and commoner than initially thought. It can be spotted on any water pond in the eastern desert, including Shaumari and Safawi.



**Desert Lark – Dark Morph**

*Ammomanes deserti*

*Seen all year round*

This is restricted to the basalt desert in the east. It has been regularly spotted in Wadi Rajil.



**Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus*

*Seen all year round*

It is found in the Eastern Desert in sandy wadis and areas with sandy patches. It has also been recorded along Wadi Araba.



**Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes*

*Seen all year round*

It can be seen in the eastern desert in sandy areas around Hazeem and Shaumari.



**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius*

*Seen in spring and summer*

This bird can be seen all along the southern rift margins in Madaba, Karak, Dana and Petra.



**White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis*

*Seen during migration in spring and autumn*

It is probably more common than initially thought, but Azraq still provides the best opportunity to look for it.



**Blackstart** *Cercomela melanura*

*Seen all year round*

All along the rift margins from Yarmouk to Aqaba, but more easily found in the arid southern rift margins and Wadi Araba.



**Basalt Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

*Seen all year round*

This is endemic to the Basalt desert of Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia but it is not a common species. It is mainly spotted on piles of basalt rocks around Safawi and Wasad.



**Hooded Wheatear** *Oenanthe monacha*

*Seen all year round*

This is one of the least common wheatears in the country, but it can still be seen regularly in Dana and Mujib in habitats similar to those of the White-crowned Wheatear.



**White-crowned Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga*

*Seen all year round*

It is quite common within its habitat, which includes sandstone cliffs in the southern highlands along Petra, Rum and Mujib.



**Striolated Bunting** *Emberiza striolata*

*All year round but more noticeable in spring and early summer during breeding season*

This species has been separated from the House Bunting to become a stand-alone species. A southern Jordan speciality, it can be seen in Petra, Dana and Mujib along the shorelines of the Dead Sea.



**Arabian Warbler** *Sylvia leucomelaena*

*Seen all year round*

It is probably less abundant today compared to a couple of decades ago, most probably due to woodcutting in Wadi Araba. Specific locations to look for it are Ghwaiebh, Ber Madhkur and Qatar.



**Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida*

*Spring, summer and autumn*

It is widespread and common along the southern margins and highlands in arboreal habitats, especially around acacias.



**Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus*

*Seen in spring and summer*

Look out for it all along the rift margins and highlands throughout the migration and summer.



## THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE

The RSCN is a non-governmental organization devoted to the conservation of Jordan's natural environment. Created in 1966 under the patronage of His Majesty the late King Hussein, the society has been given the responsibility of protecting the country's wildlife and areas by the Jordanian Government. "Wild Jordan" is a division of RSCN and the trading name for the society's eco-tourism and handicraft enterprise. Protection of natural areas helps create and improve livelihoods for underprivileged local communities. By purchasing any RSCN product or by visiting any of Jordan's nature reserves, you are directly contributing to the protection of nature in Jordan and to the income of local communities.

The RSCN is the official partner of Birdlife International in Jordan, where the society is currently implementing the national component of the Regional Migratory Birds Project (MSB), funded by GEF and supported by the UNDP and implemented by Birdlife International. The MSB project aims to mainstream the conservation of migratory soaring birds among different sectors (waste management, hunting, energy, agriculture and tourism) across the Rift Valley flyway that is the second most important flyway in the world for soaring birds.

[www.migratorysoaringbirds.undp.birdlife.org](http://www.migratorysoaringbirds.undp.birdlife.org)

For more information, maps and booking arrangements for any of the RSCN's eco-tourism facilities, please contact Wild Jordan's tourism office at:"

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